

Final Decisions
U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting
November 5-7, 2005
Republic of Palau

A summary of the meeting and meeting materials (agendas, presentations etc) will be posted on the Task Force web site (www.coralreef.gov). For information please contact Beth Dieveney (beth.dieveney@noaa.gov) or Roger Griffis (roger.b.griffis@noaa.gov; 301-713-2989x115).

.....

2. Call For Action to Respond to Caribbean/Atlantic Bleaching Event

Summary: The Task Force expressed serious concern about the scope, scale and impacts of the recent large scale coral bleaching event in the Caribbean/Atlantic region, and called for mobilizing efforts across the region (in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Initiative) to monitor and assess short and long term impacts to learn from the event.

Statement: At this time, scientists and managers throughout the wider Caribbean region have observed massive, regional-scale bleaching of coral reefs. This is related to extreme ocean temperatures around eastern Caribbean coral reefs, shown by satellite data to be at record levels of thermal stress (10-15 degree heating weeks over much of the region). As seen in previous massive bleaching events, such as the Indo-Pacific bleaching of 1997-98, such high temperature stress is known to promote the bleaching, and often death, of reef corals.

Members of the US Coral Reef Task Force meeting in Palau on 5-7 November 2005 expressed great concern over the magnitude of the bleaching event now taking place in the Caribbean. We call for immediate action to:

1. Establish an ad hoc interagency group to coordinate national and CRTF partner efforts on this event (DOI, NOAA volunteer to lead group);
2. Assist with mobilization of monitoring efforts to assess the scale and impact of the bleaching event including:
 - a. Document the extent of bleaching, mortality, and recovery including ecological and socioeconomic impacts as part of national and CRTF member monitoring efforts;
 - b. Target coral reefs for protection, especially those in resilient areas (those that demonstrate high survival and/or recovery), through additions of protected area sites to existing networks of marine protected areas and other management measures including ensuring enforcement in these areas;
 - c. Play a leadership role in developing a comprehensive response to this bleaching event in the wider Caribbean region;

- d. Improve US capabilities to forecast thermal stress and its ecosystem impacts in order to enhance management and conservation of coral reef ecosystems;
- e. Take steps to better understand and address the underlying causes of massive bleaching events; and
- f. By December 1, 2005, each member identify to the Steering Committee technical, financial, or additional resources they can provide to assist in the phase I documentation and assessment of this event.
- g. Ad hoc group to report back to the CRTF at 2006 CRTF meetings on actions, lessons learned.